

The Philosophical Anthropology Method in Cardinal Karol Wojtyła's *Person and Act*¹

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There are two main reasons why we need a philosophy of man. The object: man, which is so close to every one of us in our basic everyday experience, is at the same time too distant compared to what one would like to know. Our curiosity about ourselves somehow always exceeds what we know about ourselves. Paradoxically, this disproportion is not eliminated by the rapidly growing amount of information gathered by the impressively developing detailed studies about man. This is probably because these studies – in accordance with their specific point of view and research method – allow us to look closely at the details of the mosaic of the complex image of man, but at the cost of renouncing the view of the whole. Yes, they seem to show a fragment of this whole but also obscure it and thus distance the picture they were supposed to bring closer. This only deepens the cognitive dissatisfaction of someone who is interested in a given fragment precisely because of the whole, and not as the exclusive object of cognition. Thus, the specific studies tend to further awaken the cognitive need for a holistic vision of man that we encounter in our pre-scientific, elementary experience, and which we somehow cannot part with, although we also cannot stop at it. We need a refined, deepened, integrated, and clear image. Are these not, in fact, the sources of the ever-increasing demand for philosophical anthropology and the call for it precisely at a time when so many specific scientific studies are exploring man in various ways with such great success and improved research tools?

We turn to philosophy, but not only in order to acquire knowledge capable of integrating into an organic unity the enormous amount of partial information about man. For, in addition to knowing ourselves and discovering our own nature, we also want this knowledge to be of the best possible quality. We are not only curious about who we are, but at the same time we are vitally

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interested in ensuring that our knowledge of ourselves meets the maximum epistemological conditions. We need excellent methodological and epistemological knowledge about ourselves in order to be able to simply live as humans, that is fully rational and responsible. We turn, therefore, to philosophy, or create it, in the hope that it will give us this precise knowledge that we cannot do without, knowledge of a nature with which these exact studies cannot provide us and that they even programmatically renounce, even when they study man.

The cognitive passion of the author of *Person and Act* is, above all, an attempt to penetrate the world of the person: to see it and glimpse its essence. It is a passion, one might say, that is objective. It is expressed by the question: who and what is a man? Everything in his book serves this one purpose. And most often, this is also the goal of those who get this book or will eventually read it. However, this main cognitive passion – although somewhat in its shadow – is accompanied by the methodological aspiration of the author, that the results of his discoveries, expressed in the content of statements about man, can finally be documented. The legitimacy of the claims, the validation of results, the way of arriving at these theses about man and their justification will be of main interest to me here, even more than the content of the claims themselves. I propose, then, a certain reversal of perspective and not look, or at least not so much, at what the author has done or what meaning he gives, but how he does what he does. Here I am not considering the specifics of his work, his workshop, or his tools, but in revealing the type, the general model of the method adopted. I want to do this with the intention of looking at it also from the point of view of its adequacy and sufficiency for the purpose of formulating statements about man, characterized by the features of philosophical knowledge, i.e. in some final way and at the same time realistically objective. For I am convinced, that it is only when we are driven by the need for this type of knowledge, whether of man or of non-human reality, that we turn to philosophy and see the sense of practicing it.

What determines the research method? It is determined, on the one hand, by what is being studied, the object, in our case the human-person, and on the other by why it is being studied, the purpose, that is, what knowledge one wants to obtain about man. One and the other together: the object of the study and the aim of the study impose and co-determine specific conditions regarding how and in what manner, that is, by what method it can and should be done. Which method is indispensable and at the same time sufficient to obtain such – desired – knowledge about such a subject. The requirements placed on the method, both by reason of the subject being studied and

by reason of the purpose of its study, will be the subject of the following remarks, expressed on the margin of the reading of *Person and Act*.

1. The peculiarity of the subject, the human-person consists mainly in the fact that it can be studied – unlike all other subjects – not only “from the outside,” but also “from the inside,” “from the center.” This, of course, creates a unique and unrepeatable opportunity to get to know the person. This one chance, however, gives rise to a peculiar epistemological and methodological problem: the problem of the objective validity and controllability of the knowledge obtained from such a source of information and the problem of its intersubjective communicability. This problem emerges precisely because the uniqueness of the opportunity to get to know a person “from the inside” is, as it were, paid for by the fact that only in this way this object is always given and can always be given to only one person: the person himself. The problem here is therefore to eliminate the danger of subjectivism, of taking some egology as philosophical, i.e. a generally valid theory of man, or even of taking an illusion for knowledge about man. The author is aware of both the opportunity to know man through self-knowledge and the problem related to it, the solution which depends on a straight line of cognitive value of all results drawn in one way or another from this source. It seems, however, that with all his objective attitude he is more of a hewer and extractor of the ore that is assessed at first glance as a valuable material. And he is less its sophisticated controller or technologist of the mining process. Control is limited as if to call upon others, upon readers, and potentially everyone, as a witness who, experiencing along with the author the same thing that the author experiences in himself, would compare the author’s result with his own, thus giving his cognitive contribution to the work of creating objectively and intersubjectively important knowledge about man. I do not know whether the author would agree to such a diagnosis – a procedure that is supposed to legitimize the validity of knowledge. I also do not know whether, if it is accurate, if such control over the value of knowledge about man drawn from this “unique” source will be able to meet the most stringent epistemological requirements. The question arises, however, as to whether or not these stringent requirements reflect a real problem. I believe this is a point for a clarifying exchange of ideas on this topic. This point is crucial because its proper definition determines the methodological effectiveness of further, more detailed procedures and the cognitive value of their results.

2. Remaining essentially on the ground of the indicated source of information, the author draws knowledge about the person in two different ways:

a) by turning more directly towards oneself, towards the “I” – on the assumption that it is uniquely well-positioned for insight “from the inside” – so that based on this insight into one’s own “I,” one might formulate theses about the essence of man;

b) by analyzing the ways in which the human-person becomes dynamic.

I will leave the analysis of the first method aside here, limiting myself to the general remark already made above. On this subject, I believe, others will comment in a professional discussion. I am therefore moving on to the method – undoubtedly preferred by the author of *Person and Act* – of reaching the revelation of the essence of man through the analysis of human dynamism.

Cardinal Wojtyła, wanting to protect himself – and those who together with him experience themselves in themselves – from mistaking illusions about himself for knowledge about himself as a human-person, uses the convenient and, as it were, controlled, in relation to the method of direct insight into one’s own “I,” opportunity to study this unique subject. The opportunity, moreover, is created by the subject itself being studied, the person, by the fact that he acts and through this action he somehow implements himself in his act and in it and through it expresses, reveals and “objectifies” it. It is this – in this already noted elementary and everyday experience – connection of a person with his act as an acting agent that gives the opportunity to indirectly learn who a human-person is, by “catching a person in the act.” It is this opportunity that Cardinal Wojtyła explores in his study. It is an attempt to enter the world of the person, the man through act.

The author knows that such a starting point and way to enter the person can also be other manifestations of the person, “*osobo-fanie*” given to us in appropriate experiences, such as the experience of an absolute obligation to act or not to act in a certain way, the experience of responsibility, moral good and evil, the experience of love, interpersonal encounter and participation, the experience of amazement, questioning, striving for truth, or the experience of so-called “borderline situations” such as “existential fear” or “attitude towards death” [“*bycie ku śmierci*”], in which a person somehow opens up and reveals himself, giving him an “opportunity” to know his essence. However, if the author prefers the act as a way of revealing and explaining the problem of man, he does so in the belief that in this case it is easiest to capture the man in his entirety. And apart from this, because the act is a way of revealing a person whose objective reality

does not raise any doubts and puts up the most decisive resistance and limits to the freedom of interpretation. In this respect, the act clearly distances itself from the above-mentioned “anthropo-revelatory” facts. This therefore explains the choice of the act. Moreover, the author does not intend to interest the readers in “themselves” or shock them with the richness and originality of the contents of “their consciousness.” He does not want to write a treatise on “egology” but on anthropology. His essential consideration of the intersubjective validity of the result finds expression here in his preference for the most easily perceptible, “publicly” accessible and controllable starting point. Here we are to recognize ourselves by our fruits and in our fruits – in accordance with the classic *adagium*: “Agere sequitur esse.”

3. The person’s field of activity constitutes for the author something that is really given and directly experienced. This is the field of experience. In this field, the author discovers a starting point for reflection on man. The author understands action broadly. These are, first of all, acts but also, so called “action,” that is, what happens in the person, and even that which happens to the person. Thus, the whole range of diverse and, irreducible in themselves, real and empirically given human dynamics are analyzed here. In this analysis it is stated somewhat equally: 1) their reality, that is, that they are a fact; 2) a specific substantive content, that is, the fact that they are this or that fact, a fact with this or that content; 3) their mutual un-duplicability, that is, they are different facts; 4) empirical nature, that is, they are cognitively directly given, that in their originality they are directly present to us.

At the same time, however, it is discovered that each of these dynamisms, in its own unique way, contains within itself an element without which it would be impossible to fully identify them and thus adequately describe them. Namely, each of these dynamisms points – more or less indirectly – to one and the same source. This source turns out to be the common subject of all these diverse dynamisms. From behind each of them there always, in the end, emerges one who is the ultimate principle of unity for them all. This principle organizes the diverse multiplicity of these dynamisms into a single whole and ultimately gives each of them its own identity. The author, guided by experience, comes to discover this one principle. It is the analysis of the dynamisms themselves that leads to the fact of their existence and, at the same time, to the characteristics it must possess. Here, we will not analyze in more detail how this guidance takes place, whether it is the guidance of an effect to its cause or of a sign to what appears in it. Suffice it to say, that at

this stage of the analysis the author discovers the fact of the presence of one source and determines the essence and manner of its existence on the basis of what is contained in the content of the identified dynamisms. After this stage, however, the stage of – let's say – heuresis [*heurezy*] the Author, in most of the analyzed cases of human dynamism, carries out the next, extremely methodologically interesting stage. It shows the consequence of not accepting– at the stage of heuresis [*heurezy*] – the single unambiguously defined principle of the experimentally given dynamisms. It would have to be a denial that a given dynamism is given as it is given, that it has the content that it reveals in experience, which would ultimately result in the statement that what is, does not exist and that one does not experience what one experiences! One example of many. The negation of the thesis about the transcendence of the person, about his self-mastery and self-possession leads directly to the negation of the reality of everything that is captured as a fact of experience in the abbreviated linguistic formula: “I can - I don't have to.” I can therefore, on only one condition, not accept this thesis; by denying that I affirm what I affirm, that is, by denying the existence of what is, what is given as a fact of experience. Pointing to one source of individual dynamisms and gradually defining it as these dynamisms are analyzed is therefore not only pointing to their hypothetical reason and only a hypothetical definition of the nature of this reason. This reason cannot be exchanged for another under penalty of falling into a situation that is cognitively absurd and at the same time conflicts with experience. Therefore, it is not one of the possible reasons, but the only possible and necessary one. Necessary precisely because it determines the indispensable condition of being of what is and what is experimentally ascertained. In other words, it is necessary because it is the only non-contradictory reason for the fact that a given fact obtains, that it has the content that it has, and that it is experienced as it is experienced. Therefore, failure to accept the relevant theses on the source of experimentally established dynamisms, as well as the theses more closely defining the features of this source, is directly related to ignoring the foundations of rational thinking in general: logic and experience.

The author's statements, which methodologically express the only reasons that make the occurrence of the dynamisms that are stated at the starting point non-contradictory, turn out to be simply theses about who a man is in terms of content. They are anthropological theses. The anthropological theses of this type are therefore necessary, apodictic theses, and at the same time they are theses that are really objective and empirically validated. They express in their content that which is necessarily connected with the content of the facts expressed in the descriptive

sentences at the starting point. As a result of the shown feedback between the starting point: description of the facts – and the point of arrival: statements expressing the only reasons that make the facts non-contradictory, statements about facts are, as it were, “necessitated.” It must be as it is and as it appears to experience. Assertions about reasons become real and empirical; the necessary reason of what is real cannot itself be unreal.

Cardinal Wojtyła thus showed us in his study *Person and Act* a model of such a method that is capable of providing the theory of man with the character of a discipline that is at once real-empirical and necessary, that is, philosophical in the classical sense of the term “philosophy.” In my opinion, only philosophy understood in this way is worthy of the name. Certainly, on the other hand, people, looking for ultimate clues to solving the riddles of their real fate, unconsciously look for nothing other than this very one.

If this is the case, then a demonstration of the path to such theses in anthropology is, from the point of view of the methodology of this discipline, an extremely important thing. I do not think that anyone has proposed, or that it is even possible to propose, a model method for obtaining such theses that would be an alternative to the one used in *Person and Act*. Of course, presenting a good, effective model of a method is not the same as working it out in detail. It seems to me, however, that some improvement of the method in this discipline might consist in a more detailed elaboration of this model. Yet it is another thing to use it efficiently in practice. The author of *Person and Act* does not need to be told, because he himself knows, that in this respect his book can and should be improved, like any human work.

4. So far, I have not been programmatically interested in the content of the anthropological theses of *Person and Act*, analyzing only their methodological character. On this occasion, I also want to draw attention to their content, although even this too is not without close connection with the method of its determination. Namely, one is struck by the convergence of the content of the main theses on man in Cardinal Wojtyła’s *Person and Act* with those of the *Księżeczki o człowieku* (*The Little Book about Man*) by the recently deceased Prof. Romana Ingarden.* This mainly

* Roman Ingarden, *Über die Verantwortung. Ihre ontischen Grundlage*, Stuttgart, 1970. English translation: R. Ingarden, “On Responsibility: Its Ontic Foundations,” in *Man and Values*, trans. A. Szylewicz (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1983). This treatise is published in a Polish translation, alongside other anthropological works of the deceased professor, posthumously as part of *Księżeczki o człowieku*, Kraków, 1972. This treatise was read in the original German by Prof. Ingarden to Cardinal K. Wojtyła during several successive “Thursday evenings” at the Cardinal’s residence in Kraków. During this time, the manuscript of *Person and Act* was already finished, and the convergence of the two authors’ views is not a correlation in either direction.

concerns the treatise “O odpowiedzialności i jej podstawach ontycznych” (“On Responsibility: Its Ontic Foundations”) contained therein. The convergence of the content of the theses of *Person and Act* and Ingarden’s is sure to fascinate everyone:

- Only someone, that is, a conscious subject, can be responsible.
- Only a free subject can be responsible.
- Only an entity related to the world of innate, unchanging values can be responsible. (In other words: man understood as an absolute of freedom, defining moral laws for himself, is absurd).
- Only someone who maintains his identity in the midst of the changing world around him can be responsible.
- Only someone who maintains substantial identity as a real “I” can be responsible.
- Only someone who retains real identity despite bodily death can be genuinely responsible... etc.

In this situation, it becomes quite understandable that the similarity of the content of the anthropological theses of both authors must arouse interest as to the method of their formulation and justification used in both works. In this respect, the essay “O odpowiedzialności” (“On Responsibility”) turns out to be a methodological surprise. Despite appearances, this is not just a marginal contribution to ethics. It is, however, despite its brevity, an outline of a philosophical treatise on man, but one built on the basis of an analysis of an “anthropo-revelatory” moral fact: the fact of responsibility. Ingarden himself, in the introduction to “O odpowiedzialności” (“On Responsibility”), states in the form of a methodological declaration that although he is concerned with revealing the meaning of responsibility and discovering its necessary conditions, the formulation of these conditions will go beyond the domain of morality and its theory: ethics. It is about building a philosophical anthropology. And in fact, while analyzing the meaning of responsibility and formulating, as Ingarden himself puts it, the conditions of the possibility of the meaning of responsibility, one after another, similarly to Cardinal Wojtyła, theses about man are put forward.

But what are these theses from a methodological perspective? Are they only in the nature of determining the conditions of possibility of the sense of responsibility itself, or rather the conditions of the possibility of an empirically verifiable fact with such a sense? Are these not the conditions of possibility of the being of that which is stated as a real fact? And in the end, isn’t the

question asked here about the necessary conditions of this meaning precisely in order to finally explain this fact, that is, to provide reasons that make its occurrence non-contradictory – as Cardinal Wojtyła does? Well, it doesn't seem that there's any need to correct Ingarden here, since he himself has indirectly done it. His treatise "O odpowiedzialności" ("On Responsibility") is the implementation of an apparently modified methodological program with respect to the one declared in the introduction. Ingarden is not and cannot be concerned only with the conditions of the possibility of meaning, since the analyzed meaning of the phenomenon is given exclusively as the content of a real fact, as the content of what really exists and is stated to exist as really existing. A real person is experiencing real responsibility and therefore poses quite real questions. It therefore has a place here:

1) Change in the definition of the methodological character of the starting point of the analysis: it is not simply about meaning, but about a fact with a specific meaning. This change entails a change.

2) In terms of method: what is established and determined is not so much the conditions of the possibility of meaning, but the conditions (possibilities) of the existence of a fact with such a meaning. The relevant questions arising in this context are therefore not only questions "about essential connections," but also questions about the non-contradictory reasons that make the occurrence of real facts specific in terms of meaning. And finally, the third change is:

3) A change in the methodological nature of the point of arrival: formulated as conditions of possibility are not only theses about "free beings." These are necessary theses due to the stated facts about who in essence a real person actually is. In this sense, these are necessary and realistic theses. The methodological program of anthropology that Ingarden pursues is a program of the philosophy of man in the classical sense of this discipline, a program identical in its essence to the methodological model of *Person and Act*.

It has long been known how easy it is to find what you want to see in the object you are examining. *Liking thinking* has already had too many victims to ignore the warning that flows from this fact. I wouldn't want to be another victim of desire-based thinking. That is why I am curious what others think and what they will write about the method of the authors of *Person and Act* and *Księżeczka o Człowieku* (*The Little Book about Man*), i.e. the method of philosophical anthropology. Of course, many, if not too many, interesting things have been written about man. The issue, however, is what cognitive value it represents and can, for a sober-minded person,

represent about what is being said about him. It is simply about a sound method of philosophical anthropology. So far, not much has been said about it. Therefore, any attempt in this regard deserves its due attention. Therefore, both *Person and Act* and *Księżeczka o Człowieku* (*The Little Book about Man*) should become the subject of discussion not only by anthropologists, but also by methodologists of the philosophy of man.